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Keeping You Posted



KYP Keeping You Posted

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Headline news for busy church editors

KEEPING YOU POSTED is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination, and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter.

KEEPING YOU POSTED is edited by William C. Winslow and produced monthly by UCC One, the news service of the UCC Office of Communication. Send story ideas to: William C. Winslow, UCC Office of Communication, 475 Riverside Drive, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10115, or use the Internet address below.

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■ It's official

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is the last of four denominations to sign on to "full communion" with each other. That means that members of the UCC, Presbyterian Church (USA), the Lutherans and Reformed Church in America can take communion in each others' churches and that clergy will be welcome in any of the denominations' pulpits. It also opens the way for collaboration in missions work. The Lutherans voted in August, the others earlier in the year. While it is not "union," it does bring some 10 million Christians closer together. After the Lutheran vote John H. Thomas, UCC ecumenical officer, said, "I am grateful to the delegates of this churchwide assembly for their affirmation of full communion in this Formula of Agreement, even as I give thanks to God for the persistent call to overcome divisions that have existed between Lutheran and Reformed Christians in North America for over 250 years." A similar agreement between Lutherans and Episcopalians failed to muster a two-thirds vote.

■ Does it make a difference? You bet

What happens to all of those resolutions on social ills in faraway places that General Synods regularly adopt? This July, GS 21 called for an end to travel restrictions on Palestinians and for Jerusalem to be an open city to Christians, Muslims and Jews. That vote came just before the suicide attack in Jerusalem, but Martin and Betty Bailey, UCC missionaries in Palestine, say the Synod action is very helpful. "The resolution on Jerusalem is very timely in terms of the peace process," write the Baileys. "UCC and Disciples people would do well to use it as the basis of letters to President Clinton and Secretary of State Albright." The Baileys, who live in Bethlehem, also report that since the Israeli crackdown after the bombing, tourism to the birthplace of Jesus has practically ceased to exist with resulting great economic hardship to the Palestinians.

■ Taking on Mayor Giuliani

Two landmark UCC churches are challenging New York

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's controversial workfare program. The mayor is making thousands of welfare recipients work for their benefits, but they are taking the places of fired city workers. Welfare benefits add up to considerably less money than the full-time city workers were earning. This is wrong say the two Manhattan churches, Riverside and Judson Memorial, part of a larger coalition resisting Giuliani's effort to place additional workers with the non-profits. Worse, points out Judson pastor Peter Laarman, the workfare workers are trapped into the welfare system. Their jobs depend upon their receiving welfare benefits, so there's no incentive to get off the dole. In addition, the New York State Supreme Court ordered the mayor to stop his program until workers receive such basic necessities as toilets, drinking water and protective clothing. "There are real concerns whether this is a just program," says the Rev. Robert Gentile, director of public ministries at Riverside Church. "There are abuses in the program that need to be fixed."

■ From Lincoln to Rome on a grace note

Tourists at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, the seat of the Roman Catholic Church, were surprised to hear the choir at a Saturday afternoon mass this July. Not just a Vatican choir but the 55-member ensemble from First Plymouth UCC, Lincoln, Neb. A choir member's wife works at the Vatican and made arrangements. A second bonus for six members was a private mass with Mother Teresa. Tammy Alvis, Plymouth's media director, made that connection in one frantic day of phone calling using names her mother had given her. "It was a humbling experience," said one participant, to see a saint in her lifetime.

■ We know who you are

Those ads really grab you. "To some, a multi-cultural church doesn't have a prayer. To us, that's a great place to start." "We don't give racial reconciliation just a lot of talk _ we live it." "To end racism, we believe we must begin by desegregating Sunday morning." This is not overblown advertising copy. It represents what Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Oak Park, Ill., firmly believes in and practices. The three ads, created by a church member, have run in the local paper. According to pastor Carla Grosch, the formerly all-white congregation now has a church school that is 30-40% people of color while overall membership is 10-15% people of color. For a copy of the ads, call Ms. Grosch at the church, 708/848-5860.

■ Who gives in the UCC?

UCC members give more money to the One Great Hour of Sharing offering than to any of the church's other three offerings and two appeals, as they have for the last five years. OGHS is for domestic and overseas relief. In 1996, 65% of all churches participated, averaging \$2.24/member. Neighbors in Need is second, 52% at \$1.42; followed by Veterans of the Cross, 40% at \$1.27; Hunger Action Fund, 8% at \$.98; Strengthen the Church, 18% at \$.79 and Just Peace Appeal, 6% at \$.61. People who join the UCC from other faith groups support OGHS, NIN, Veterans of the Cross and Just Peace more than native UCCers while former E&Rs are attracted to Strengthen the Church and Hunger Action.

■ Dying person's Bill of Rights

When people visit someone gravely ill in a hospital, they seem to think of only two questions, reports Wilton S. Haffey, Jr., pastor of Ridgeview Congregational UCC, White Plains, N.Y. When are you going to die and do you need any food? It's awkward; we don't know what else to say, he concedes. Recently, Haffey came across "The Dying Person's Bill of Rights," written by a group of ill patients in Michigan. I have the right:

- To be treated as a living human being until I die;
- To maintain a sense of hopefulness, however changing its focus may be;
- To be cared for by those who can maintain a sense of hopefulness;
- To express by feelings and emotions in my own way about what is ahead;
- To participate in decisions concerning my case;
- To continuing medical and nursing attention even though "cure" goals must change to "comfort" goals;
- Not to die alone;
- To be free from pain;
- To have my questions answered honestly;
- To have help from my family and minister in accepting death;
- To retain my individuality and not be judged for my decisions which may be contrary to the beliefs of others;
- To discuss and enlarge my religious experiences;
- To have the right to expect that the sanctity of the human body will be respected after death.

■ Jobs with an attitude

Looking for a job? Larry Gaffin can help. He offers career counseling and resume writing, but there's a difference. Gaffin is a UCC minister who runs the Center for Life

Decisions in Seattle and is of a new breed of careerists who places spiritual, moral, religious, ethical and holistic questions at the heart of the job quest. Gaffin thinks values bring meaning to a person's life. Western culture, he says, tends to separate the sacred from the secular. Work has one set of values, everything else another set. But if the two are bridged, life becomes seamless, and in Gaffin's view, work takes on a spiritual dimension. His clients agree. A hydrogeologist became an acupuncturist while an exbanker heads up a hiking advocacy group.

■Adapted from an article in The Seattle Times

■Now that's awareness

A group of students at UCC-related Beloit College in Wisconsin decided to make the public aware of breast cancer in a novel way. They hung a 450 ft. long string of bras across a heavily trafficked bridge and handed out educational materials on the street.

■Oh no!

A politician asked his pastor what the state could do to help religion. Stop printing one dollar bills was the reply.

■Seen on "Eculaugh," a meeting on UCChristnet

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